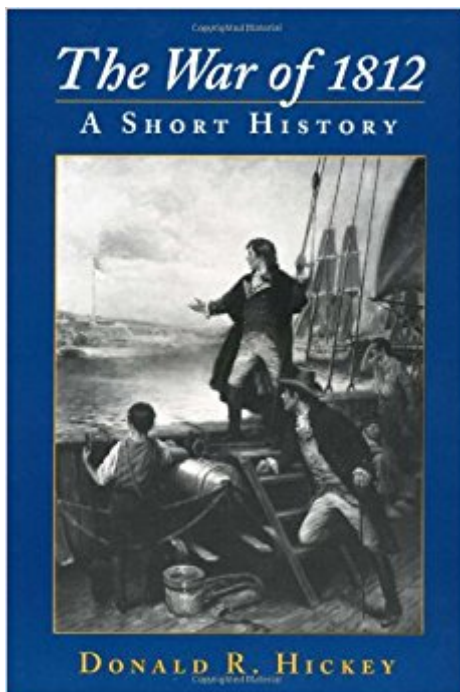


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The War Of 1812: A SHORT HISTORY



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Customer Reviews

Although the book gave me what I wanted (looking for additional information on the Battle of Lake Erie), I was disappointed in its overall depth. It was a quick read and was pretty much as described by others; I was simply hoping for more.

While Hickey has an excellent command of the facts, his conclusions are born of political spin - selectively engaged facts to build a narrative that is more self-satisfaction than scholarly analysis. His thesis, that the war was manufactured for political positioning and had little consequence because the British had no real plans for North America is wrong on both counts. *Casus Belli*? Hickey dismisses the provocations of preying on the merchant marine and impressing the sailors by making reference to the low cost of insurance. He dismisses the obvious, the merchant marine was the lifeblood of the young nation and the engine of prosperity. He ignores the personal - 6000 sailors impressed into British service. I try to imagine the sentiment of the nation during that era with so many of its families impacted by that brutal British policy and the fate of the political party that supported the Jay Treaty. The Federalists were perceived as elitists who were more worried about their landed financial interests and less about the fate of the common man and the sovereignty of the nation. From that perception came the elitist label and the end of their party. In the *Coming of War*, Hickey all but calls the Republicans isolationists. In *Conclusions*, he accuses the Republicans of needless war mongering for political advantage. What he misses in between is a country whose sovereignty was under assault on multiple fronts. That Americans were not looking for

a fight is obvious from the decade-long effort to stay out of the mess created by European elitists fighting endless wars. That some of the Federalists policies were in many respects better is obvious, but their demise is easy to understand. Getting this country to fight at all was a miracle brought about only after great effort and miscalculations on the part of Great Britain. Great Britain judged Americans wrongly: They didn't see a cohesive nation after they witnessed the easy flipping of coastal towns and assumed all Americans were so weakly bonded together. This was not the Second Revolutionary War or the Unnecessary War, it was the finishing battles of the first. Hickey calls the result of the war a failure of Republican policies. The real point is that the beginning of the war was a repudiation of the financially-centered policies of the Federalists. These policies, while convenient to a weak nation seeking economic growth, sacrificed national sovereignty - a position that can not be tolerated forever. That the all-powerful Federalists could disappear so early in the nations history is simple repudiation enough. That Hickey ignores the obvious for tortured logic is lazy scholarship. One can not help feel that he wrote many of these conclusions in allegiance to modern American politics.

Great Book

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MY GRANDSON NEEDED TO MAKE A REPORT ON THIS BOOK SO WE BOTH READ IT AND FOUND IT WAS VERY GOOD.

I recently watched an episode of the TV show "Madame Secretary" in which a fictitious Secretary of State and a fictitious Canadian ambassador, disagree about who won the War of 1812. There are four different versions of this story - the American, the British, the Canadian and the Native American. The History Channel, as well as most Americans, believe that the US clearly won the war. In national mythology it became a "second war for independence." The U.S. started the conflict and failed to achieve any of its prewar objectives. By 1814 the country was virtually bankrupt as a result of the British blockade. American historians have used some tortured logic to turn 1812 into a win. Donald Hickey believes that the war was a stalemate or a draw, but he implies it was a moral victory. Hickey's book gives us the American perspective, and he tries to explain and justify the actions of America's leaders. He does not really discuss how the war is viewed in Britain or Canada. British historians have recently started looking at the war in detail and

they have concluded that America cannot claim any sort of victory. On June 1, 1812, President Madison declared war. Hickey claims the causes were: Britain's blockade of Europe, the impressment of American sailors, and its support of Native Americans on the frontier. Hickey's narrative mainly focuses on American politics and the U.S. military. He describes in detail the individual military actions around North America, but does not give the whole picture. Hickey ignores much of the geopolitical and economic context. Britain and France had been fighting since 1793. For Britain, the war was a sideshow, the real war was in Europe. On July 22, 1812, Wellington defeated the French at the Battle of Salamanca, and in August captured Madrid. By 1812 most Britons were fed up with Napoleon and war in general. Britain started its European blockade after Napoleon created the Continental System in 1806. This closed every market in the French Empire to British goods. Napoleon persuaded Russia, Prussia and Austria to join in. The British retaliated by introducing the Orders in Council, which prohibited neutral ships from trading with Napoleonic Europe except under license. Britain's economic sanctions angered Washington. However, New England merchants, became the strongest opponents of the war. Coastal New Englanders whose income was dependent on shipping openly called for accommodation with Britain and even traded with the enemy. Britain was short of sailors and blamed America for employing British seamen. British warships stopped American ships and impressed any British sailors they found, into the Royal Navy. While some of these men were Americans, most were born Britain. Some had deserted from the Royal Navy, a hanging offence. France was also in the habit of violating U.S. sovereignty at least as often as Britain, but Washington insisted that the British were by far the greater culprits. American politicians admitted privately that half of the sailors on American merchant ships were British citizens. The British hoped that Madison would change his mind about war once he heard that the stated cause—the Orders in Council—had been dropped. Madison then changed his grievance to the impressment of American sailors. Britain was prepared to concede on this as well. Prime Minister Lord Liverpool promised that wrongly impressed American sailors would be released. However, Madison seemed to want a war, and invaded Canada. It is not clear why Canada became the target of American wrath. The British view is that Madison seized an opportunity to grab Canadian land when Britain appeared weak and distracted. Britain believed it was trying to rid the world of an evil tyrant and regarded Madison as pro-French. It was also believed that Jefferson and the Republicans coveted Canada. Jefferson believed that the capture of Ontario would be "simply a matter of marching." For Canadians, the main story is the failed invasion of Canada by a disorganized U.S. Army. The Americans expected to be greeted as liberators, but this did not happen. Instead, the British and their local allies repulsed

the invasion. The war gave rise to Canadian heroes, like Isaac Brock and Laura Secord. The Canadians still believe they won the war. Britain fought the war with whatever resources it could spare. British historian Amanda Foreman claims that this was no more than 7% of the total British military effort. The British quickly imposed a blockade of the American coast, virtually halting all trade by sea. Foreman states that "In 1813 only a third of American merchant ships got out to sea. The following year the figure would drop to one-twelfth. American oceanic trade went from \$40 million in 1811 to \$2.6 million in 1814. Custom revenues which made up 90% of federal income fell by 80%, leaving the administration virtually bankrupt. By 1814 it could neither raise money at home nor borrow from abroad. Surprisingly, Hickey does not say much about the blockade or its economic consequences. In order to prevail the U.S. needed France to win the war in Europe. British dominance of the seas meant that the U.S. could not take the war to the British Isles. After Madison's attacks on Canada had failed, the U.S. was running out of options. By the autumn of 1814 the key New England states wanted out of the war, and Massachusetts considered seceding from the Union. The army was short of troops. The government was basically bankrupt and unable to pay the army. The nation's capital had been torched. British naval historian, Andrew Lambert, states that "The war at sea had turned against America, the U.S. Navy had been defeated, privateers curbed, ports closed and trade at a standstill." The only rational course was to try to call a halt. The British were amenable. Britain did not start the war and wanted it to end. Europe was unstable and Britain did not want to send a large army to North America. After defeating Napoleon in 1812, Russia was on the rise and viewed as a potential threat. Britain had also started fighting the Anglo-Nepalese war in 1814. At Ghent, Britain offered the US a return to the pre-war territorial status. The peace treaty which ended the conflict said nothing about the maritime issues that supposedly caused the war in the first place. By accepting these terms the Americans acknowledged their failure to achieve any of their war aims. Britain's objectives were to protect Canada and to force the U.S. to stop fighting. The British succeeded in this respect, and also nearly destroyed the American economy with little damage to their own. Once the treaty had been signed, the British returned their focus to Europe. Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo in June 1815. Andrew Lambert concludes that "Anglo-American relations remained difficult for the next fifty years, but when crises erupted over frontiers and maritime rights, British statesmen subtly reminded the Americans who had won the War of 1812, and how they had won it." Lambert reports, that while Napoleon was being taken to Saint Helena, on a British warship, he expressed a wish that the Americans had tried harder.

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